

09.26.07: Report on Listening Tours

California's Education System: Preparing for the Future, Meeting the Community's Needs and Developing the Workforce

Executive Summary

The following Executive Summary provides key information, findings and recommendations from the first seven California State University Listening Tour meetings conducted by Lieutenant Governor John Garamendi, from February 2007 through July 2007.

The Lieutenant Governor's Listening Tours have been designed to bring together leaders of the education, business and labor communities, along with student representatives and members of the general public. Their purpose is to discuss critical issues and identify important needs surrounding our education system's role in preparing California for the future and developing the workforce of tomorrow.

Listening Tour locations included in this report include the California State Universities at Bakersfield, Fresno, San Bernardino, East Bay, Los Angeles and the California Polytechnic Universities at Pomona and San Luis Obispo.

Each Listening Tour event was a public meeting that included CSU administration, faculty and students. In addition, leadership from local community colleges, career and technical education programs and local K-12 school districts also participated. Local chambers of commerce and economic development organizations, business owners and program administrators represented the business community. Labor union leaders and Central Labor Councils also participated. At selected Listening Tour meetings, economists specializing in business and workforce forecasting and analysis presented information about the state of current and future economic trends and market needs.

The Lieutenant Governor plans to continue holding Listening Tour meetings at each of the sixteen remaining campuses of the California State University system over the course of the next year. Additionally, several special-focus Listening Tours will be held at selected Community Colleges that provide a unique perspective on a specific area of workforce preparation.

Key Observations and Findings

As a result of information garnered during the first seven Listening Tour Meetings, the Lieutenant Governor has identified several key objectives aimed at improving our higher education system's role in preparing and developing California's future workforce.

Career and Technical Education Programs - Current programs that prepare students for such occupations as computer technicians, laboratory technicians, automotive technology, public safety and construction trades, do not adequately meet current workforce needs. It is projected that the need for skilled workers will continue to grow significantly in the next ten years. It is incumbent upon government, academic and business leaders to develop plans to increase the capacity and availability of programs that provide training for important high skill occupations. These programs meet the workforce needs of businesses and provide good paying careers for Californians

College Preparatory and Readiness Programs - University and community college leaders identified "student readiness" as a common impediment to student advancement and success. The need for preparatory and remedial programs in writing, math and science is abundant. Creative programs that use real-world experiences to promote student achievement in these areas, are described as being among the most successful methods. Additionally mentoring, tutoring and partnering programs are also highly regarded. Ultimately, improving student readiness for college-level education will require strong partnerships between middle schools, high schools, community colleges and universities

Availability and Affordability - At each university campus, students described increasing difficulty in paying fees, tuition and buying books and materials as a result of the continuing escalation of these costs. Many students are using community colleges as a lower cost method of completing their undergraduate requirements. Students and faculty also describe the impact of course-offering reductions on undergraduate program completion. It is now common for the traditional four-year degree to take five to six years to complete - not because of greater requirements, but because of the unavailability of required and core course-offerings

Re-framing Higher Education - It is readily apparent that the success of our education system depends on re-framing the debate, discussion and policy approach to our state colleges and universities. It is incumbent upon us to re-frame the dialogue in terms of investing in our state's intellectual, economic and financial capacity. Rather than thinking of the education system in terms of cost, we must transform policy makers' mind-set to one of a future "return on investment."

Catch words like "Career Development" "Entrepreneurial Preparation" and "Innovation Incubation" should replace terms like "Undergraduate Education", and "Job Training"

The economic vitality and strength of our state and the success of our citizens is directly dependent on California making a serious and comprehensive financial commitment to our community colleges and state universities. Collaboration and partnerships between academia, business, labor and policy-makers will be critical to meeting these commitments.

Discussions, and planning for economic development ring hollow unless paired with adequate investment in our schools and focused preparation of our future workforce.

Key Suggestions from Listening Tour Participants

Academia

Implement student adjustment programs (i.e., "Foundations of Excellence" project)
 Improve portability of credits and classes between and across community colleges and universities
 Increase need-based financial aid
 Provide basic skill improvement programs in reading, writing and analytical thinking
 Promote greater integration between faculty and industries/careers
 Transform community colleges into "colleges of the community," that meets the specialized workforce needs of their surrounding area
 Business Organizations, Leaders and Career and Technical Educators

Create after-school classes and programs using "small group project models" to prepare high school students for careers
 Develop partnerships with local corporations, utilities and businesses to provide specialized education and apprenticeships. These partnerships should encourage students to complete their studies and should include post-graduation employment commitments
 Implement value-added agricultural education programs that teach students not only the process to cultivate and grow agricultural products, but also teach other related skills, such as: juicing, bottling, canning and marketing
 Promote business investments in Career Technical Education and academic education by establishing measurable benchmarks and goals and demonstrating proficiency and effective use of their investments
 Offer high school and college electives that are career-oriented, hands-on and relevant to real-world jobs
 Labor Representatives

Attempt to equalize funding between prisons and higher education
 Limit future increases to student fees to keep university doors open to all students
 Expand apprenticeship programs. Labor leaders report that for every four journeymen that retire there is only one apprentice in the pipeline
 Create partnerships between business, local government, unions, educators and faith-based groups to create career and technical training programs that meet actual and future workforce needs
 Increase student capacity and lab space for nursing and allied health education
 Increase availability of programs that prepare students to qualify for training programs in criminal justice, fire and life safety
 Create career ladder apprenticeship and job-training programs in growing industries, such as transportation, hospitality, food, agriculture and the building and construction trades

Conclusion

The Lieutenant Governor has completed the first seven of twenty-three planned Listening Tours, focusing on California's education system's ability to meet the workforce needs of our state. Several key policy objectives have already been identified: increasing career and technical education; improving the readiness of students for higher education; ensuring the availability and affordability of higher education; re-framing the debate about higher education into a focus on investing in our state's intellectual and workforce quality and capacity.

By taking these steps, our state will be better prepared for the economic challenges of the future, maintain our leading role in the world economy, remain on the cutting edge of research and development and have a highly-prepared workforce for the future.

These steps will also help us keep California's long standing commitment to our students: that every California high school student who works hard and gets good grades will have the opportunity to go to a high quality college or university.

The Lieutenant Governor plans to integrate the information gleaned from these Listening Tours into new policy ideas that will help ensure California's economic future and vitality. He intends to utilize his role as Chair of the California Commission on Economic Development and his role as a member of the CSU Board of Trustees and Regent of the University of California to bring these and other ideas to fruition.